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Grammar in Computer-Mediated Discourse: an analysis of the grammar of travel blogs

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RESUMEN

El presente trabajo está basado en el análisis del lenguaje utilizado en los blogs de viaje. El objetivo principal ha sido analizar los aspectos gramaticales de los blogs de viaje, que están determinados por las características del medio y la finalidad del género. Los materiales utilizados provienen de un corpus de 10 entradas con sus respectivos comentarios tomados de 2 blogs diferentes. El objetivo de este análisis es estudiar hasta que punto este género tiene un carácter conversacional e interactivo. En primer lugar, el trabajo comienza con una introducción a las características del discurso de los géneros digitales. Entre ellas destaca el rápido intercambio de información, la manera en que la sincronización de los mensajes se produce y la participación de los usuarios. En segundo lugar, se presenta una descripción de los elementos de la gramática online (Herring 2012).

La tercera parte, se centra en los blogs y en la manera que sus usuarios han adaptado características propias de la conversación en el medio escrito para contribuir a la participación. Los motivos más importantes para escribir y/o seguir un blog de viaje están relacionados con el deseo de intercambiar información y estrechar lazos de amistad entre personas de intereses similares. Ésto hace que los usuarios utilicen un lenguaje más informal, por lo tanto, más cercano a la comunicación oral. Finalmente, el análisis de los comentarios ha mostrado que aunque los blogs son un género escrito, tienen un carácter muy conversacional, ya que comparten características del lenguaje informal.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Internet has become such a significant part of daily life that most of the time the influence that it exerts on communication is unnoticeable. The rapid growth of new digital communication technologies has changed the way in which language evolves. The development of internet language has attracted the attention of linguists since the invention of the first computer network in the late 1960's in the United States. Most language-focused Computer-Mediated Communication research to date has analysed English (Herring 2012). The main reason for this focus on English is the importance of English not just as a first language, with approximately 360 millions of speakers, but also as a second language with almost 1 billion speakers, therefore becoming the lingua franca of intercultural communication and the lingua franca of the Internet (Vettorel 2014). Researchers such as Herring (2012) consider that digital discourse in English displays specific features of spelling, vocabulary, word-formation or sentence structure, which she has called "e-grammar".

The purpose of this work is to analyse the features of e-grammar in a specific online genre: travel blogs. Travel blogs have spread in the last decade as a genre used by travellers not just as record of events or a diary, but also as a platform for sharing experiences and giving advice or recommendations to future travellers, which has made it a very interactive genre where the exchange of information between blogger and reader plays a very important role. The main focus is going to be how language adapts features usually more related to speech and face-to-face conversation into online genres of communication.

2. COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION

Computer-mediated discourse was the term used by Susan Herring to refer to the communication produced when human beings interact with one another by transmitting messages via networked computers (Herring 2001). The study of Computer-mediated discourse, which is going to be referred to hereafter as CMD, is focused on the traditional aspects of discourse analysis used in computer-mediated communication (CMC) in order to analyse language and language use in computer networks and the variety of genres originated in it.

It soon became apparent that the language of the internet shared features of spoken and written language. Some linguists have defined it as "written language", due to its medium characteristics, since it is typed on a keyboard and displayed on a screen (Maynor 1994 in

Herring 2007: 2), “written speech”, given that “it is characterized also by informal features of spoken discourse” (Androutsopoulos 2011: 1) or “interactive written discourse” and “digital networked writing” due to its interactive and dialogical nature (Vettorel 2014). The term “Netspeak”, coined by Crystal (2004) to refer to electronic language, acknowledges the interactive nature of this type of discourse. “Netspeak” is a combination of the word “net” referring to the place in which CMC occurs, together with the suffix “speak”, which “involves writing as well as talking. ‘Speak’ also has a receptive element, including ‘listening and reading’ (Crystal 2004: 18). Crystal considers Netspeak as a new variety of language, in contrast to Herring, who argues that there is not a singular term for all the categories of online language. For him CMC is not a hybrid of spoken and written discourse but a new form of language that has just appeared as a consequence of the prominence of the Internet and which displays characteristics that can only be applied to online language.

When analysing CMD, it is necessary to take into account that it is a medium of transmission-communication mainly based on text, that is, “messages are typed on a computer keyboard and read as text on a computer screen, typically by a person or persons at a different location from the message sender” (Herring 2001: 1). Therefore, e-grammar differs in some aspects from the usual employment of speech, due to its electronic and physical character. Following Herring (2012), I will refer to the aspects that characterise the linguistic features of online texts as e-grammar. There are some linguistic aspects, which online communication lacks in comparison to face-to-face interaction, that have been replaced with other functions of grammar. The importance here relies on the understanding of how e-grammar is used to write speech without losing features of conversational speech. In this way, grammatical features such as phonology in CMC are less relevant compared to orthography or typography, which have to assume the functions of sounds. For example, in a conversation between two people that takes place in a face-to-face interaction, one of them might express a feeling of surprise by elevating the pitch of their voice or by shaking their hands in the air. All of these non-verbal aspects of speech are substituted in e-grammar through the use of multiple exclamation marks or the use of capital letters.

Although CMD has been characterised as a hybrid between writing and speech there are many aspects that distinguish it from these genres of language. One of the features that make it different from speech is the speed of the exchange of information. Although CMD exchanges are faster than written exchanges, this cannot be compared to the exchanges that

take place during a conversation, “not even in so-called “real-time” modes.” (Herring 2007: 13). Crystal (2011: 31) mentions two major differences between the e-language and speech. The first one is lack of simultaneous feedback, due to the functioning of the technology. This aspect also characterises online conversations with a lack of reaction from the receiver as they do not get to know the information until the whole message is received. By contrast, during a face-to-face conversation where one of the participants does not like the topic, his facial expressions may change, letting the other participant know how he might be feeling. The second difference between the language of the Internet and speech is the slower rhythm of interaction between participants, which can be also affected by the unexpected problems that the functioning of technology might have. For instance, when posting in a blog, there is no certainty as to how long it will take to get a reaction.

The capabilities of the medium also influence CMD. CMC genres are divided into two categories depending on whether or not transmission is synchronized: synchronous modes and asynchronous modes (Herring 2013: 3). Synchronous modes require the sender and the receiver to be connected at the same time, and therefore messages are posted in a permanently refreshing screen in which several users can participate. An example of the latter is real-time chats. By contrast, in asynchronous modes the interaction occurs in a postponed time. Asynchronous modes enable the users to send and receive messages at different times and places; the information is stored so that it can be always available for its users with no regard to the time that has passed since a message was posted. According to the linguistic structure, both modes differ in several aspects. Asynchronous modes present features more alike to writing, as users have more time to construct and create messages which usually seem closer to a formal style, although, as Vettorel (2014: 76) explains, “CMC can range from highly formal and structured to unscripted and spontaneous communication.” In contrast, synchronous modes are linguistically closer to speech as the necessity of speed in its exchanges is faster “resulting on the whole in shorter, syntactically less complex messages” (Vettorel 2014: 76). Typing speed involves saving as many keystrokes as possible and as a consequence the use of language changes so as to type a message as fast as possible. The consequences of this phenomenon are for example the loss of punctuation marks or apostrophes, the use of abbreviations like “hi” for “hello” or acronyms such as “btw” for “by the way”. This strategy has been defined as “linguistic economy” (Androstopoulos 2011) or “economy of effort” (Murray 1990).

Another important distinction related to the synchronicity of participation is whether the message transmission is one-way or two-way (Cherny 1999 in Herring 2001: 3). Messages sent through one-way transmission platforms are sent as a single unit. Consequently, the receiver is not aware that a message is being addressed to him, losing the possibility of giving direct feedback, as would happen in a face-to-face conversation where the participants are capable of interrupting if necessary. In contrast, two-way transmission usually takes place in simultaneous conversations, where the speaker and the receiver are able to interact in real time and receive the message as it is produced.

3. FEATURES OF E-GRAMMAR

This section of the essay is going to analyse the linguistic features that generally characterise CMC genres based on previous literature reviews. When describing e-grammar several aspects need to be taken into account. Firstly, the levels of formality vary immensely from one genre to another, as people do not use the same language when they write an entry in an online professional magazine as when they speak with friends through a chat. Secondly, as it was mentioned before, online language usually follows the strategy known as “economy of effort” so that users do not “waste” a keystroke. Thirdly, the prosodic and non-verbal features of speech have found mechanisms for being represented in e-grammar.

In this section I will discuss the following aspects of e-grammar: First, the evolution of the typography or graphic features which compensate for the lack of paralinguistic and extra linguistic elements; secondly, orthographical elements more related to the aspect of linguistic economy; related to the latter, morphology and the apparition of new vocabulary and the phenomenon of word-formation; and finally, how syntax is being affected by the spontaneous interactions as users have reduced the word chunks into a more limited number of words. As Crystal explains, “the most general features of Netspeak distinctiveness are currently found chiefly in graphology and the lexicon – the levels of language where it is relatively easy to introduce innovation and deviation” (2004: 91).

(i)Typography

Typography appears to be the most important feature and the one which has experienced the greatest change in order to adapt to the online environment (Crystal 2004: 92). According to the latest Longman Dictionary definition, typography is “the arrangement, style, and

appearance of printed words.”. In the case of e-grammar it mainly refers to the use of non-alphabetical symbols such as special keyboard symbols, punctuation or numbers as to simulate aspects of handwriting and substitute the absence of non-verbal and prosodic markers (Herring 2012: 2). During a conversation, some elements of speech help the interlocutors to transmit different meanings or feelings, for example, non-linguistic body gestures help the speakers to express a feeling of happiness by smiling, or doubt by shrugging of the shoulders. Other markers such as raising the volume of one’s voice may denote surprise, or making several pauses may indicate sadness. All of these features have found a way to be expressed in typography. Some of the most recurrent techniques that are going to be analysed in depth hereafter are emoticons, distinctive graphology, punctuation and substitution.

The first technique is the use of emoticons. Emoticons are sequences of keyboard characters that are constructed by combining punctuation marks so as to emulate a facial expression. They can be placed at any point in a sentence although they are usually found at the very end. Nowadays most of these emoticons have been replaced by small images that can range from facial expressions to animals, food or actions as it happens with the thousands of symbols that can be found on chat groups such as Facebook. Vandergriff (2014) concludes that there are two main purposes for the use of emoticons. Firstly, as markers of affective stance, emoticons are the demonstration of the affective attitudes between the participants of a conversation and their relationship. Secondly, to serve the needs of the pragmatic functions of e-grammar that is to say “the sender's intention or stance with respect to the verbal message and her positioning vis-à-vis the co-participant(s)” (Vandergriff 2014).

A different device in typography is the use of distinctive graphological elements substituting for conversational aspects which create an atmosphere closer to speech which are regularly used to represent the qualities of sound. Some of these elements are: the use of repeated and alternated punctuation marks i.e. “What????”, “Good!!!!”, “Really?!?!” and the repetition of letters i.e. “oh noooooo”, “Sorryyyy”, “Thanksss”. For example, in the sentence “I reeeeeeally need your help”, where a participant is asking for a favour or making a demand, the use of extra letters contributes to the emphatic tone. Other typographical conventions that entail emphasis are: the use of capital letters or so-called *All caps* (abbreviation for “all capitals”), in order to make words look louder or create an effect of yelling (“This product comes with NO WARRANTY”, “ARE YOU SERIOUS?”), letter spacing used for

clarification (“I said y e s”) or the use of boldface and italics. Nevertheless, it is important to note the limitations of the latter conventions as Crystal explains “these features are indeed capable of a certain expressiveness, but the range of meanings they signal is small, and restricted to gross notions such as extra emphasis, surprise, and puzzlement” (2004: 34). The final typographical innovation is the “occasional substitution of words or parts of words with numbers or letters to save keystrokes and/or to symbolize a playful communication style or social identity” (Herring 2012: 2). For example “BTW” (by the way), “B4” (before), “4U” (for you) or “comin 2 uni” (coming to university).

(ii) Orthography

Non-standard orthography is widely considered to be a defining characteristic of computer-mediated language (Herring 2012: 3) and includes spelling as a practice which plays an important role in the use of orthography in e-grammar. The orthographical set of features that have undergone more changes are: abbreviation, for example, nowadays the use of acronyms such as “LOL” (Laughing Out Loud) or “OMG” (Oh My God). Other variations make use of features like clipping, such as the one used here before “App” (application) or “Profpic” (profile picture, referring to Facebook) and, the omission or change of vowels as in the word “alright” which can be found written as “aiight”, “alrite” or “alryt.”. Here, these variations in spelling may be also determined by social conventions containing different social meanings. Some of them are spellings that imitate casual or dialectal pronunciations, i.e. “wassup?” for “what’s up?” (Herring 2012: 3), onomatopoeic spelling as the use of “meh”, which expresses indifference or boredom, or the verb “to click” which spelling can be associated with the sound produced by pressing a button on a mouse or other input device. In addition, the technique of the “eye dialect” ridicules pronunciation through the use of non-standard spelling like “lissen” for “listen” or “sed” for “said”, while always maintaining the grapheme-to-phoneme correspondences of the standard pronunciation and spellings that represent prosodic or non-verbal sounds such as “You knooow?” or “byeeeee” (Herring 2012: 3).

Sebba (2007) explains how social contexts and orthography are interlinked. The merging of those aspects has resulted in orthographical innovations that might be related to social practice and have led to changes in the standard orthography. Variation allows orthography to maintain the original meaning of words but at the same time adds extra meanings or implications that are employed according to the preferences of its users (Sebba

2007: 6).

(iii) Morphology

Morphology is one of the linguistic features that has not been analysed in depth compared to typography and orthography, but it is clear that the phenomenon of word-formation and the appearance of new vocabulary is an important aspect of e-grammar. This can be seen in the new words that have been recently accepted in dictionaries of Standard English. Some examples that can be found in the last version of the Oxford English Dictionary are: “screenager” referring to “a person in their teens or twenties who has an aptitude for computers and the Internet”, or “FOMO (fear of missing out)” or the “anxiety that an exciting or interesting event may currently be happening elsewhere, often aroused by posts seen on a social media website”. In addition, Herring points out that “the most creative examples of e-morphology have been reported in playful, self-contained contexts” (2012: 4). For instance, it is not the same case that may take place in an app or an online video game in which its participants create a community in which these creations are intentional. Thus a person who usually plays online games might be familiarized with the acronym “pwn”, which refers to the act of dominating an opponent. Other examples of acronyms or shortened expressions are “OOP” or “out of power” and “BBL” meaning “be back later”. Summing up, the degree of lexical inventiveness is related both to innovation but also to the conventionalisation of repeated mistakes.

(iii) Syntax

At the syntactic level, e-grammar is experiencing the speed and the spontaneity of the interaction which have led to a decrease in the number of words that form a sentence. CMC syntax is known to be “telegraphic and fragmented” (Herring 2012: 5) and also closer to an informal style. That means, firstly, that syntax tends to be more colloquial and closer to conversation as it involves a more personal tone through the use of slang or figures of speech, and secondly, that sentences are simpler, avoiding complete grammatical clauses and usually making use of ellipses, contractions and abbreviations. In this way, participants reflect what they think and speak but in a written form. This kind of informal writing is generally thought to be more used in CMC genres where the exchange of information is faster as for example in social networks, chats or instant messaging. However, this phenomenon is starting to spread

to other genres like emails, blogs or online advertising due to the rapid personality that the computer-mediated environment is acquiring. One of the main questions related to syntax that linguists have tried to solve is if it is closer to written or spoken discourse. Most of them seem to agree that it can be defined as a hybrid; for example Crystal (2001) states that Netspeak syntax is closer to writing than to speech as it lacks “the very features of spoken language which indicate most spontaneity – notably, the use of reaction signals (mhm, uh-huh...) and comment clauses (you know, you see...)” (Crystal 2001: 40). In the case of blogs, there are syntactic features typical both of written and spoken discourse, as the format always depends on the blogger’s preferences. However, blogs are usually characterised by an informal and casual style which involves the “presence and availability of linguistic structures that users can associate with spoken discourse” (Puschmann 2009: 2).

4. BLOGS

Blogs are part of what has been referred to as “Web2.0.” This is one of the major developments that the web went through during the late 90s. The term can be related to the “new uses of web technology and web design, especially involving participatory information sharing; user-generated content; an ethic of collaboration; and use of the web as a social platform” (Herring 2013: 2). In contrast to the Web 1.0, which refers to the first stage of the World Wide Web tool, and which was characterised by unidirectional communication as the user was not able to interact with the webpage contents, Web 2.0 is a much more interactive environment, in which exchange practices are a common trait. With the Web2.0., the web became a space where the improved technological advances enabled “the publication of user-generated textual and multimedia content, and participation in web spaces such as social networks, media-sharing websites, wikis and blogs” (Vettorel 2014: 33). This event transformed online communication making possible social interaction from any point of the world by linking information and people. Thus participation and collaboration between users and the sharing of multimodal files have become two of the main features that characterise Web 2.0 sites.

The origin of the blog dates back to the late 1990s when a series of websites similar to what are now known as blogs were compiled and linked between each other due to similar interests of the bloggers. Taking into account their structural characteristics, blogs are defined as “frequently updated web pages with a series of archived posts, typically in reverse-

chronological order” (Nardi, Schiano and Gumbrecht 2004: 222) characterised by “their easy to use format and the possibility to allow comments by readers” (Vettorel 2014: 36). A great number of blogs are largely centred on personal topics, as a medium of personal self-expression. This is why it shares some features with other author-centric genres like the diary, which fulfils “partly the symptom of a psychological desire for mediated self-expression that predates the implied antecedents” (Puschmann 2003: 77). In the remainder of this section, I will describe the technological features of the blogs related to the medium, the features of the communication systems, and the social features related to the contexts, the participants, and its motivations.

According to Herring (2007), the main characteristics of a blog are the following: asynchronicity, as the exchange of information is not performed in real time; one-way message transmission, as the main discussion is being decided by the blogger; persistence of messages in archives linked from the sidebar of the blog, making content more easily accessible for the reader at any time; Web-based delivery and a tendency for messages to be text only; and the display of blog entries in reverse chronological sequence with a “comment” option below each entry.

The blog can be described as having features of asynchronous web modes (which enables its users to communicate at different times and places regardless of the time passed since a post or comment has been published), although due its immediate and interactive nature it stimulates features closer to synchronicity or near-synchronicity. Features of asynchronicity are ascribed to the temporal references of the blog both in the post and in the comments, and also to the extra time that the participants have to construct the messages. Despite these features, blogs have a conversational and interactive nature, mainly achieved through the use of comments that make them a near-synchronicity genre. Comments have a very important communicative function and always appear in chronological order. This technological system allows the readers to comment on a post by giving feedback to the blogger, asking questions about a topic, and making comments to which the blogger can respond altogether, creating a sense of face-to-face interaction and of community (See Figure 1).

Samuel Jeffery October 12, 2013 at 5:33 pm

I totally agree with you! Today we took a flight that landed really roughly after some turbulence. I was completely terrified.



REPLY

Sista Voyage October 16, 2013 at 1:32 am

I admire your honesty about being terrified! Whenever I am on the plane with other passengers, they are either so knocked out from sleep despite the turbulence or they seem like it doesn't bother them! I am always looking around like, ' don't you all FEE that. OH EM GEE! Is this it for me?' LOL!



REPLY

Figure 1. Fragment of comments to a post in *Nomadic Samuel*

Through the comments, the blogger and the reader establish a dialogue and a relationship which is usually based on shared interests by both participants, which has resulted in blogs becoming such a widespread genre. This relationship relies on the desire of communication “which is enacted on the blogger’s side by posting entries [...] and on the audience’s side by adding comments, which can in turn be answered by the blogger, creating at times a sort of asynchronous chat” (Vettorel 2014: 63). Comments usually have a colloquial and informal style, which merges elements of speech and writing in order to obtain a certain degree of friendliness and closeness. Linguistically they are closer to speech, giving rise to a simpler grammatical and syntactical language style, which makes use of personal pronouns, contracted forms, abbreviations and emoticons among other aspects of e-grammar (Vettorel 2014: 85). It should be remembered that the audience has a significant role as it is to them that the blogger addresses his posts. Accordingly, it is important for the bloggers to keep the interaction going.

Motivations for blogging and the choice of topic are always related to the blogger’s personal preferences. Puschmann (2009) identifies two main types of blogging. The first type is ego-blogging, based on the blogger himself and the narration of personal experiences or the reflection of inner thoughts and feelings about a topic considered relevant to the blogger. Therefore, blogs become a tool for self-expression. They have a less formal style (closer to speech) and a self-centred point of view. In this case the objective is to record events, influence the readers’ opinion and maintain relationships. The second type, topic-blogging, is

specifically focused on sharing information about the external world i.e. fashion, politics or technology. Consequently the audience of topic-blogging can be considered more specialised, and therefore topic-blogging may have a more formal and informative character, using a technical vocabulary and an external point of view closer to description than to narration (Puschmann 2009: 3; Puschmann 2003: 93). What can be deduced from this dichotomy is that one of the final goals of a blogger is "sharing" with others, no matter whether it is a personal experience or external information, which creates a community of people who share common interests. Interaction in the blog thus becomes a 'one-to-many conversation' where the blogger takes the lead role.

This work focuses on the language used in travel blogs. Travel blogs can be defined as a genre where "tourists usually publish their personal travel stories and recommendations" as they "often reveal multiple aspects of a tourist's experience at a specific destination" (Li and Wang 2011: 690) These kind of blogs are characterised by the inclusion of not only text, but also pictures, both to grab the attention of the readers and as supportive material. Goethals (2013: 152) lists some of the motivations for writing them: "as a way of helping people who are going to visit the destination, evoking memories to the readers who have already been there and, providing an enjoyable reading for those who read for pleasure and personal interest". In relation to motivation, the way in which a blogger approaches the topic can be defined by two major principles. The first principle highlights the way in which the author presents the trip, that is, whether he focuses on the realization of the trip, its evaluation or its narration. The second has to do more with the interpersonal orientation of the blogger, which can be displayed in a more intimate or interactive direction (Goethals 2013: 152). But the degree of formality, whether it features elements closer to either a speech-like or a written-like style, always depends on the communicative goal of the bloggers and the relationship that they intend to create with the readers.

5. ANALYSIS

5.1 Data

The data for this analysis have been taken from two travel blogs: *Nomadic Samuel* (<http://www.nomadicsamuel.com/>) (NS) and *Further Bound* (<http://www.furtherbound.com/>) (FB). The data consist of 5 different posts of each blog selected by chronological order including the comments to all of them. *Nomadic Samuel* is a blog written by Canadian boy

who has been travelling all over the world for almost a decade and who portrays himself as a nomadic soul. In his blog, Samuel talks about his experiences, and provides information, advice and tips regarding the different places he has visited. The purpose of blogging for him seems primarily to share experiences with readers who are willing to prepare a trip or who have already had similar experiences. *Further Bound* is written by Hannah, a 33-year-old English girl who decided to sell everything she had and left her life behind after a breakup and has been travelling now for 3 years. In addition to sharing the experience of travelling, in her blog, Hannah writes her inner personal thoughts about what she sees and experiences. The main reasons to choose these two blogs were as follows: (i) they have a high rate of visits and comments; (ii) they are written by individual authors, one by a woman and the other by a man; (iii) the style used by both bloggers is very different. Each blog follows one of the principles described in the previous section according to the way information is presented. *NS* presents his stories in a narrative way. Samuel uses language features closer to speech, with a more colloquial tone through the use of a narrative style. By contrast, *FB* has a more descriptive tone that distances it from the conversational style. The blogger makes use of language in order to make a depth description of what surrounds her. Entries are similarly organised, and both blogs include text and pictures. *NS* is the only one that includes a specific section devoted to videos in which he explains curiosities about the traditions of different countries, therefore integrating another kind of multimodal material.

The following section presents the results of the analysis of the features of e-grammar in the ten posts taken from these blogs.

5.2 Results

Blog discussions consist of two parts: the post itself and the comments triggered by the post, where the blogger and the readers engage in an interaction related to the content of the post. The entries written by the blogger are more written-like and less conversational in nature than the ensuing comments. However, there are differences between the posts of the two blogs. The first difference is in the different use of language. Although the number of features that constitute e-grammar is very wide, I am just going to pay attention to the ones closer to speech aspects. Firstly, the blogger in *NS* uses more features of interactive discourse. The use of second person pronouns is more likely to be found in *NS* as the blogger usually addresses directly the reader at the end of his posts. Even though second person pronouns appear

frequently in *FB*, the number of third person pronouns is specially high, creating a more distant and objective perspective. Other elements of interactive discourse that are frequent in the posts of *NS* are questions, which according to Myers (2010: 82) “can be used to elicit information or in rhetorical function” for example “*Are **we** trapped? Is this a tunnel?*” or “*how did I come to associate them with feelings of anxiety?*”, and directives, which invite “the audience to make some sort of action” (Myers, 2010: 82) i.e. “*Have **you** ever been on a train that derailed?... Please share **your** stories below*” and “*Have **YOU** ever wanted to run The Amazing Race?*”. With the use of pronouns in the questions, the blogger achieves a closer relationship with the audience as sharing personal experiences creates closer interpersonal connections.

The posts in Nomadic Samuel include several features of e-grammar that imitate a speech-like style:

- (1) Orthographic features as onomatopoeic sounds are represented by “*Thump. Bang. Crash. Thump. Bang. Crash*”, here alternated with an emphatic use of punctuation, or imitating someone’s voice: “*Jaaahhmmessssuuuuh Deeeaaaaannnnuuuuh. You look likeeee himmuhh*”.
- (2) use of contractions, as a conversational aspect. When speaking people tend to contract some words so as to have a faster rhythm of conversation, the same happens here. Whereas *FB* tends to leave contractions out of the posts, *NS* uses of them regularly: “*I’ve requested; NO, I’ve demanded since...*” or “*It’s where I’ve called ‘my home’*”.
- (3) use of direct speech and commentaries between inverted commas and slashes i.e. “*You pay for beer. Pay for beer now*”, “*No way. This can’t be it.*”, “*– FYI I’m terrified of flying –*”, which gives the feeling to the reader of being immerse in a face-to-face conversation. In the last example “FYI” is an acronym which means “for your information”.
- (4) Syntactically, sentences do not contain a large number of words and paragraphs are divided in multiple chunks providing a faster rhythm closer to speech. For example some sentence fragments consist of just one word i.e. “*Panic.*” or “*The truth is I’ve no idea.*” or of orality markers as in “*Of what was I so afraid?.*”

By contrast, the blogger in *FB* avoids the use of any typographical or orthographical

innovations, which makes the two blogs visually different. From the analysis of both blogs it can be concluded that *FB* has a more formal style as the blogger prefers a more descriptive narration of the events. Nevertheless this always depends on the impact that the blogger wants to create on the readers. For instance, in one of the posts analysed, Hannah tells that she was robbed, employing a more conversational tone as she seeks for the empathy of the readers. She achieves this goal for example through the use of italics and short sentences:

- (5) “the memory card from our camera is still in the computer. We’ve lost all our photos. I haven’t backed up my work since October. We don’t have insurance. We can’t afford a new one. I’m totally screwed.”
(*FB*)

Consequently the result obtained is immediacy, by telling the readers what she thought in that precise moment, she creates an atmosphere that, as Myers explains, “make readers feel like they are being talked to” (Myers 2010: 77). This vision is interesting, as it gives another point of view to the near-synchronicity character of the blogs: they are close to conversation but as immediate response cannot be received, the message is sent in a way that readers feel that the blogger talks to them. Another important factor to point out in *FB* is the use of “free indirect speech” (Myers 2010: 84).

The second part of the analysis focuses on the linguistic features of e-grammar which occur in the sample of comments taken from both blogs. Comments are the part of the blogs where interactions take place. As a result, it is the area in which written language displays more characteristics of conversation. One of the main reasons for this to happen is the necessity of replacing the prosodic features of speech with e-grammar.

The most frequent features in the data analysed are those related to typography and orthography. Within typographical elements, emoticons are the first aspect to be analysed. Both bloggers and readers make frequent use of them. The most common emoticons are those that transmit positive feelings like smileys and winkies, leaving apart the ones with negative connotations which may damage the establishment of a relationship. According to Vandergriff (2014) winkies are markers of conversational humour conveying a meaning “between what the verbal message seems to convey and what is actually meant” and the smileys are a sign of emphatic communication.

- (6) Aren’t learning experiences great? LOL! Hopefully, plenty of future ESL teachers are reading this and taking notes. And, I could deal with a smaller place. I think the politically correct term is “cozy”. 😊
(*NS*)

- (7) LOL, definitely builds character 😊 Now that I'm far removed from that place I can think of it as being 'cozy' I suppose 😊
- (8) Looks like an amazing adventure ahead! Best of luck and I look forward to reading your updates from the road 😊
- (9) Thanxs Sarah 😊 (FB)

In relation to typography, the use of distinctive graphology is very common as an embodiment of sounds. Some of the devices are the repetition of punctuation marks, letter spacing, and, the repetition of letters and the use of all caps contributing to a more emphatic tone:

- (10) I am always looking around like, ' don't you all **FEE** that. **OH EM GEE!** Is this it for me?' **LOL!** (NS)
- (11) Wow,,, Poopy sure had on the sparkles!!! (FB)
- (12) **I HATE** flying, but you could never tell while I am booking the flight and boarding the plane [...] that I am **IN CONTROL** while driving puts me more at ease. (NS)
- (13) **LOVE THIS** xx (FB)
- (14) Oh, boo!! i'm so sorry to hear that! What a heartbreaking feeling!!!! (FB)
- (15) It was love. **L O V E** love. (FB)

Other features related to graphology, like omission of letters "FEE" instead of "FEEL" as in the example above, the loss of capital letters at the beginning of a sentence or missing punctuation marks like commas can be associated to the fast typing speed of the economy of effort strategy. Graphology is a very innovative aspect.

Some features can be related to conversational aspects: acronyms, interjections, clippings, substitution of words and imitation of casual speech.

- (16) **Gosh, gosh, gosh**, how **LOVELY!** You **gonna** make people out there jealous of you for getting your laptop stolen (FB)
- (17) **Noooo, I feel so bad for you.** I hope you'll find your precious **macbook!** (FB)
- (18) You will love Thailand, **am** going there end of march to visit my sister who's lived there over 2years, I've travelled **alot** of SE Asia & it's been my best of travels, will **defo** love it [...]. (FB)
- (19) Many blessings during the continuance of your **RTW** travels. (Round The World) (NS)
- (20) **Geez**, derailing the train is a **heckuv** a way to get people to pay their beer tab, Samuel! All kidding aside that would have scared the **bejeezus** out of me(NS)

At a syntactic level, in online interactions “sentences generally appear less complex, with frequent elliptical expressions” (Vettorel 2014: 86). This is also the case in blog interaction, where sentences formed by a small number of words imitate casual speech. Another aspect that seems to occur frequently is the omission of subject. Teddiman and Newman (2013) accounts for this device by relating the personal blogs with the diaries. They explain that “if the target audience is oneself or a few friends, then the ellipted text may be recoverable based on personal knowledge that is unavailable to the outside observer” (Teddiman and Newman 2013: 5). As it happens in the following examples:

- (21) Great to hear that your ride has begun. Am sure you are having an awesome time. Good luck Cheers.
(*FB*)
- (22) hi Hannah. Came across your blog today and started reading them. Really sorry for what happened to your Macbook. (*FB*)
- (23) Lovely. Inspiring. Just a couple of words for this post AND [...] (*NS*)

6. CONCLUSION

This work has examined the features of e-grammar in CMD genres, more specifically in travel blogs. Previous research has characterized online discourse as having features both of written and spoken discourse. However, there are many different online genres, and the specific linguistic features of each genre depend on the features of the medium and the purpose of the genre. Specifically, users have shaped e-grammar for their necessities in online communication, supplying the prosodic and paralinguistic features of orality. This work has focused on travel blogs, a genre used for sharing information with other travellers and for the narrative of experiences. The corpus of this analysis has been taken from two travel blogs, from which five posts with their corresponding comments have been analysed.

The analysis of the comments has confirmed that even though blogs are in fact a written genre, which can be associated with other author-centric genres, they have a very conversational nature with features of informal language. This is related to the fact that comments are the easier medium for the blogger and the reader to interact. Interaction takes place between people who share common interests, in this case related to travelling. That is why while analysing both blogs it was observed that users maintain relations and usually post one to the other. These features contribute to creating intimacy and solidarity between the reader and the blogger giving rise to a very interactive exchange of messages. These

interactions take place mainly in the comments which display the highest degree of informality, as users tend to write as they speak.

The features of grammar that have undergone a greater change in travel blogs are those associated with typography, morphology and syntax. The distinctive typography replaces the lack of paralinguistic elements specially with positive emoticons with a emphatic function. In addition, distinctive graphology (e.g. the use of repetition of punctuation marks and letters, bold and italics or letter spacing) appears to be one of the most frequently used features. CMD is characterised by the principle of linguistic economy, which affects both orthography and syntax, which have been adapted to the expressive needs of the users. Therefore, morphological innovations tend to shorten words and syntax, reduce the number of words per chunk, as interactions tend to be more casual or spontaneous.

In conclusion, the language used in travel blogs has evolved in order to supply the necessity of interaction and self-expression of the users, who have chosen to communicate between each other by means of a written language, due to the nature of the medium, but adapting features of speech in order to focus on participation and sharing and achieve a more informal and intimate tone.

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